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PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [FR](#) [MA](#)  
SUBJECT: FRENCH AMBASSADOR PUSHED OUT OF MADAGASCAR

Classified By: CDA George N. Sibley for Reasons 1.5 (B/D).

¶1. (U) Barely six months into his tour, Gildas Le Lidec, the French Ambassador to Madagascar, announced his imminent departure at the 14 of July National Day celebrations held at his residence. Shocking most of the assembly, including Foreign Minister Marcel Ranjeva, who was present as President Marc Ravalomanana's representative, Le Lidec bluntly stated that he was leaving because he had not been permitted to fulfill his diplomatic role.

¶2. (U) Every paper in Madagascar featured this as front page news the following day, several of them noting that, since presenting his credentials in February, he had been rebuffed 11 times in requesting audience with Ravalomanana. Caught off guard by Le Lidec's announcement, Ranjeva improvised, pointing out that the relations between Madagascar and France remain strong and noting that the Government of Madagascar had not sent any diplomatic note asking that Le Lidec be withdrawn. He drew the distinction between nations and persons, acknowledging that perhaps discussions about Le Lidec had taken place at "another level."

¶3. (C) The poorly kept secret is that the "other level" discussion was a direct appeal by Ravalomanana to French President Sarkozy asking that Le Lidec be withdrawn. The rather eccentric rationale, also bruited in the newspapers, is that Le Lidec is "unlucky." Some Malagasy contacts suggest the President's reasoning is quite logical, but couched in Malagasy terms that are difficult for Westerners to understand. According to them, Ravalomanana has reportedly noted that several of Le Lidec's previous posts, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cote d'Ivoire, have fallen into conflict after his arrival and questions whether this is merely a coincidence. Of course, the process of agreement would normally have been the proper context to voice such concerns and seek a different ambassadorial nominee. In private conversation with the Charge, Le Lidec expressed as much disappointment in his own government for acceding to such a bizarre request as he did at the Malagasy President for having made it.

¶4. (SBU) At the same occasion, Le Lidec announced the forthcoming visit to Madagascar of Alain Joyandet, French Minister of State for Cooperation and Francophony. While Le Lidec did not give dates for this or for his own departure, it would be extremely awkward for the Ambassador to remain for this high-level visit. Most expect Le Lidec to be gone by the end of July.

¶5. (C) COMMENT. With France having just assumed the Presidency of the EU, this bombshell comes at an inauspicious time, given Madagascar's desire for increased assistance from both France and the EU. It also highlights Ravalomanana's growing capriciousness. In a previously-scheduled meeting of the senior diplomatic corps (minus Le Lidec) the following day, most ambassadors agreed that Ravalomanana seems to be growing increasingly isolated from both his diplomatic partners and even from his own government. We see it the same way. END COMMENT.

